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## **Introduction**

The Military Family Coping Project is a systematic line of research aimed at empirically informing clinical and programmatic interventions to aid the development of family resilience and functional coping related to deployments. This proposal represents Phase II of the program, in which we aim to investigate the interactive influence of risk and resilience factors in predicting functioning of Soldiers, ISOs, and parents during the pre-deployment preparation process. This study is unique in terms of its emphasis on deployment preparation, as well as the inclusion of spouses and parents, who are also impacted by deployments and provide a family context in which Soldiers readjust following deployment. It is anticipated that this project will provide valuable insight into familial risk and resilience factors among service members, ISOs, and parents, including an understanding of the exchange of generational coping mechanisms. These data will identify malleable risk factors that will empirically inform the development and improvement of early intervention and treatment programs aimed at promoting health and well-being of service members and their families. Understanding factors that influence the well-being of both service members and their families is important not only to reduce social, physical, health care, and public health costs, but also to improve the longevity of service members being deployed in terms of their ability to re-set for next tasks and missions.

## **Body**

The research team of the Military Family Coping Project worked diligently in this past year to extend our sample and proceed with our project. LTC. (ret) Sharon Reese, Dr.PH (Co-Principal Investigator and Project Coordinator) and 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt (ret) Celia Feller worked actively with appropriate unit commanders to arrange recruitment opportunities. With the end of the Iraq war and pending draw down in Afghanistan, fewer troops are leaving Fort Hood on deployment. To date we have briefed over 1500 soldiers. Of these, we have enrolled 350 Soldiers, 66 spouses (ISOs) and 28 parents. Thus, we have obtained 70% (350/500) of our core sample of Soldiers (see demographics below). To further our recruitment efforts, a point of contact (POC) identified by the III Corps Surgeon Office continues to work with us to identify other units scheduled for deployment. At this stage in the war in Afghanistan, units seem to be deploying in smaller numbers. We have added the help of Sgt. (ret) Celia Fuller to our efforts to identify and set up opportunities to brief units and obtain volunteers for our sample.

As we work toward the conclusion of this project, we have added almost 100 new soldiers to the data base along with doubling the number of spouses in this project. Thus, the study is benefitting from the No Cost Continuing Resolution, which will end in March of 2015. The current political situation in the Middle East has changed remarkably. With the planned termination of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan the consistency of mission suggests that we need to close down recruitment to this study. Clearly any further deployments in the Middle East will have very different mission objectives. Further, in an effort to do justice to the data analysis, we will be cutting off any further sample recruitment by the end of September and submitting project closure forms to 3 of our 4 IRBs. The fourth will remain open even after we have closed recruitment as their rules state that it needs to remain open until the completion of all activities, including data analysis. This will allow our team to focus completely on data analysis and writing through May when the final report is due.

## Data Analysis

Under the direction of Dr. James Ellor (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Sandra Morissette (Co-PI), all study databases for the three groups have been constructed, and data have been entered and cleaned. Codebooks for databases have been constructed. The research team began to run preliminary statistics in an effort to develop procedures and trouble-shoot any challenges when working with the data in SPSS. Databases are constructed with an eye toward extending the study to be longitudinal.

Table 1. Recruitment and Demographics

	Soldiers	Intimate Significant Others	Parents
Total Recruited	350	66	28
Average Age	Mean 27.97 (SD)	Mean 31.13	Mean (55.15)
Average Years Education	Mean 15.01 (SD)	Mean 15.46 (SD)	Mean 15.23
Gender	Male: 182 Female: 66	Male: 3 Female: 22	Male: 8 Female: 19
Average number of deployments	Mean 0.54 (range: 0-5) 132 soldiers have previously deployed at least once	4 ISO's have deployed	2 parents have deployed

Preliminary analyses indicate that our sample is now closer to being reflective of the gender distribution in the Army in general, with 26.5% women and 73.09% men. The first units surveyed tended to be support units which meant that we had a rather high percentage of women. The addition of a combat unit has brought the percentage closer to a normal range, while still allowing for oversampling of women to conduct analyses that will help us to better understand the experiences of women in the military as compared to men. Of interest, preliminary analyses indicated that women drink considerably less alcohol than men prior to deployment. Factors that influence drinking patterns in women and men will be further investigated. The average age of the sample is 27.97. In this group, 58.4% are married and 52.8% have children. The average Soldier in this data set has been in the military for 5.8 years, with a mode of 1 year. Forty-six percent of the Soldiers were deploying for the first time which accounts for the mean deployments being less than 1, while 54% had deployed on 1 to 5 previous deployments.

A second area reflects a measure that we are developing in this study. To our awareness there are no existing measures of pre-deployment family functioning. Our team developed the "Perceived Family Assets for Deployment" (PFAD) scale. It was developed as a set of items designed to directly measure participants' perceptions of their families' readiness for deployment separation. Exploratory factor analysis (principal components with varimax rotation) was done using the 7 items of the PFAD to determine the factor structure. The responses of 233

participants who had completed all of the PFAD items were included in this analysis. Two components/factors emerged and seemed to be representative of: 1) “positive perceptions of readiness” (items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) with an adequate inter-item reliability estimate for research purposes (i.e., Cronbach alpha = .777); and 2) negative perceptions of readiness (items 1, 7 included in the analysis after they were reversed scored). As the “negative perception of readiness” factor consisted of only two items it was not used as a scale in further analysis. The “positive perception of readiness” factor was used as a new variable labeled the PFAD scale which was used in further analyses as a measure of family perceived readiness for deployment variable. Preliminary psychometric analysis supports the preliminary utility of this measure. Future studies will examine its predictive utility.

A third area of investigation revolves around religious coping. In this sample, 57.1 percent of the soldiers about to deploy indicated that religion is either important or very important. Chi square analysis comparing the importance of religion with the number of deployments suggests little difference between persons who have not been deployed before and those who have. Similar analysis of religious coping suggests that those who feel that religion is important are more likely to use positive religious coping such as seeking a spiritual connection or support to handle stress where persons who see religion as somewhat or not important at all are more likely to employ negative religious inference such as feelings of being punished by God, or spiritual discontent. Interestingly, both groups are highly likely to employ religion in their coping; however, the literature suggests that those who employ positive aspects of religion will find them more useful in coping than those employing negative images.

#### Key Research Accomplishments To Date

1. 70% of our core Soldier sample is complete. A POC is established with III Corps Surgeon Office and additional recruitments have been scheduled.

#### Paper and Poster Presentations at National Conferences since the start of the Award

- Crow, J., Myers, D., Ellor, J., Dolan, S., Reese, S., & Morissette, S. B. (submitted). Parent-Adult Child Relationships across the Military Deployment Cycle.
- Ellor, J. W., Crow, J., Dolan, S., Morissette, S., Myers, D., Reese, S., Rivers, F. (2011). *Walking Along Side Military Families: Military Family Coping Project*. Paper presented at the NASW-Texas, Dallas, TX.
- Ellor, J. W., Myers, D., Dolan, S., Crow, J., Morissette, S., Reese, S., Rivers, F. (2011). *Walking Along Side Military Families: Military Family Coping Project*. Paper presented at the Council for Social Work Education, Atlanta, GA.
- Ellor, J. W., Crow, J., Dolan, S., Myers, D., Reese, S., & Morissette, S. (2011, April). *Intergenerational Coping In Times of Military Trauma: The Military Family Coping Project*. Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society on Aging, San Francisco, CA.
- Dennis, Regina (Staff Writer). (2012, February 28). *Baylor, Waco VA hospital studying veterans' family stress*. Waco, TX: Tribune Herald.
- Slayden, Stacey (Reporter). (2012, February 28). *VA Hospital and Baylor University team up to study effects of deployment*. Waco, TX: Fox 44 news.
- Ellor, J. W., Crow, J., Myers, D., Morissette, S., Dolan, S. (2013). Social Work with Parents of Deployed Service Members. National Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter, Austin,

Texas.

Maranville, P. G., Sanford, K., Ellor, J. W., Crow, J., Dolan, S., Myers, D., Morissette, S., Reese, S., and Whitten, J. (2014), Assessing Interpersonal Relationships in Deploying Soldiers: Is It Informative or Redundant to Measure Multiple Relationship Types? Presented at the Annual Meeting, Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapists, Philadelphia, Pa. November, 2014.

## 2. Public Education and Media Involvement

Fogleman, Lori (Media Contact). (2012, February 17). "Baylor University Research Team Receives \$350,000 Grant to Fund Second Phase of Military Family Coping Research Project." Baylor University Media Communications, <http://www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=109624>.

## Reportable Outcomes

We remain engaged in the process of data entry of most recent recruitment briefings. Until we have a complete data set we will not do any final analysis. Therefore, none at this time.

## Conclusion

This third year has reflected significant effort by our research team to obtain our sample. Staff is fully trained in conducting research with military personnel. In keeping with the drawn down in deployments, just over half of our sample goal has been obtained. We are eager to continue our recruitment efforts and have established relationships with Commanders to facilitate ongoing recruitment. Codebooks are established, databases created, and data entry and cleaning is completed in real time. We are awaiting full data collection before analyzing the primary hypotheses, but are preparing other related manuscripts to inform our understanding of deployment preparation.